Opening Statement

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Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Energy
U.S. House Committee on Science

Hearing: Dept. Of Energy's Plan for Climate Change Technology Programs

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Madam Chairwoman, thank you for holding this important hearing today, and thank you to the witnesses for taking the time to prepare your testimony and to be here.

I believe that Climate Change is one of the most important issues we face as a nation and as a member of the global community. James Hansen, a NASA scientist who is one of the country's leading climate researchers, has said he thinks "we have a very brief window of opportunity to deal with climate change... no longer than a decade, at the most."

Most of my colleagues on this Committee, from both sides of the aisle, agree that something must be done, for which I am thankful. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the full membership of the House, the Senate, or the current Administration.

In 2002, when the Environmental Protection Agency released a report that concluded global warming "is real and has been particularly strong within the past 20 years... due mostly to human activities," President Bush quickly dismissed the EPA's work as a "report put out by the bureaucracy."

Instead, his Administration has used an argument of 'uncertainty' to justify more research and no action. On a positive note, the National Academy of Sciences has declared that the Climate Change Science Program's strategic plan "articulates a guiding vision, is appropriately ambitious, and is broad in scope." However, the review was critical of the program for its failure to state projected budget requirements and lack of milestones and evaluation mechanisms.

Both of these failings seem linked to a broader strategy designed to avoid taking any action on this very real problem. For example, in August, the House Majority Whip stated that he thought the information on climate change is "not adequate yet for us to do anything meaningful."

This effort to foster 'uncertainty' has impacted even the setting of goals for greenhouse gas emission reductions. Because of 'uncertainty,' the Administration has refused to set a goal for the stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere; instead, a goal for "greenhouse gas intensity," how much we emit per unit of economic activity, has been identified.

The problem with this measure is that if our economy grows, emissions will increase. But the Earth's systems don't care about our economy - it is the absolute amount of emissions that matters, and more emissions are a problem.

Sadly, even the emissions intensity reductions the Administration has set are weak. According to the Energy Information Administration, the goal that has been set is as little as a one percent improvement over "business as usual."

The main question before us today is whether the Climate Change Technology Program plan actually lays out a path for how to achieve even the moderate targets the Administration has set.

From the many comments about the draft plan, the answer appears to be no. The plan may be an excellent compendium of current technologies, but it seems to be lacking in a number of areas:

- there is no mention of cross-cutting enabling technologies or integrated approaches to greenhouse gas emissions reduction;
- there are no timelines or technology roadmaps;
- it places a low priority on measurement and monitoring technologies;
- it makes no mention of adaptation to climate change; and
- there is no mention of a policy framework for making this all happen.

Other problems have been identified with the draft plan but I won't take the time to list any more, they are in the committee hearing charter and I expect that the witnesses will tell us about them in greater detail.

If we are going to achieve real reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in order to address global climate change, it is critical that we develop the technologies that will allow us to do so.

The Climate Change Technology Program plan is supposed to accelerate the development of those technologies, and so it should be an important part of our response to climate change

But I am worried that the draft plan that has been developed does not provide the roadmap that is necessary to help the Administration set priorities and make choices among competing technologies. I hope the final plan will do so.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses today on how we can do just that.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman; I yield back the balance of my time.